

## FOR MORE CLARITY IN ENTOMOLOGICAL WRITING

BY OSMOND P. BRELAND

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

The present short article deals with a fault in entomological writing about which the writer has thought for many months. Too many entomological papers are written in such a manner that only the specialist in the particular group under discussion will have the faintest idea as to what insects are being considered. The reason for this, of course, is that frequently only scientific names are used without any indication as to the order or family to which these insects belong.

This lack of clear definition in entomological writing expresses itself in two distinct but related ways: first, in the matter of improperly defined titles of papers; and second, in the use of unexplained scientific names in the body of the work.

The writer has read several times within the past few months quite worth-while articles in which facts of general biological interest were discussed. But alas, only scientific names were used. Thus, at the time of reading, the writer had no idea whether the author was discussing the biology of a rare species of caddis-fly, or, except for the fact that the paper was in an entomological journal, whether perchance the writer was elaborating upon the bionomics of the arctic snowshoe rabbit! The bored skeptic will probably think that anyone who is so ignorant should be put to the trouble of identifying such scientific names for himself. The writer has tried this method. Not only that, but he has spent hours tearing his hair while looking through book after book that failed to yield results. Perhaps the greatest offenders are those who deal with host and parasite relations, since at times a dozen or more hosts of a given parasite, embracing several orders, are listed by scientific name without any indication of the orders or families involved.

Considering the fact that there are several hundred thousand species of described insects, it seems somewhat optimistic to expect anyone to have a speaking acquaintance with even a majority

of these forms. Many of us who are interested in insect biology desire to learn something of the work within groups in which we are not specializing. Yet we enjoy knowing what insect is involved without having to scrutinize several volumes in order to find out. There are also other biological workers who, although not essentially entomologists, are becoming increasingly interested in insects. It is certainly not encouraging to these men when they look through an entomological journal, to find that too often their eyes meet only horrible scientific names not adequately explained.

It seems to the writer that perhaps many workers are prone to write only for those men either in their own particular field, or for those who are working with the particular group of insects in which they themselves are interested. While the indiscriminate use of scientific names might, in a measure, be justified from this standpoint, the author should be optimistic enough to believe that perhaps other biologists might likewise be interested in the article. This type of writing is quite definitely not encouraging to the beginner in a particular field who has started to become acquainted with his subject.

In all fairness to modern writers, it should be said that, on an average, they are much clearer in this connection than were the writers of a half century or so ago. Many of these venerable old gentlemen helped to confuse the issue by writing descriptions of new species in Latin! Some journals publish better articles in this respect than do others, so that in some publications perhaps half or even more of the titles will indicate clearly what family or order is involved in the particular paper.

One additional reason why writers should clarify their publications applies to workers in the future. As the years pass, many of the scientific names that are accepted today, will fall into synonymy and, consequently, those names will drop out of the literature except for their occasional appearance in monographs of the groups concerned. This fact will, of course, add a double burden to future workers who are attempting to work out synonymy, or who are dealing with the biology of a certain group.

Needless to say entomological writing is not the only field that is cursed with inadequately explained articles. There is practi-

cally no scientific writing that would not benefit by clarification in some respects.

The writer believes that these difficulties can be obviated in great measure if authors will follow two very simple rules:

1. Make titles as clear as possible. This can be done in some cases quite easily. If only one or two species are being discussed, the order and family of the insects involved, should be added in parentheses after the title proper. If the paper deals with a number of species, including several families or orders, obviously this would not be possible. Rule number 2 is especially suggested for such papers.

2. The first time the scientific name of a species is used in an article, the family name of the species should be appended in parentheses.

It seems to the writer that entomology in general would profit if journals would adopt the above two regulations as requirements for all articles that are published. The writer feels that if authors would follow these two simple rules wider reading in entomology would be stimulated. It would also doubtless help to dissipate the commonly held opinion that an entomologist is a species of animal, wearing spectacles and a beard, that indiscriminately spouts scientific names.